

CHAPTER XIII

RUSSIA

RUSSIA is, of course, and above all for Socialists, the biggest question mark of the post-war world. As such, the Webbs fully recognised it. From 1917 on, they listened about Russia, read about Russia, learned about Russia, discussed Russia. There are enthusiastic pro-Russians in England who would deny their interest, and assert that up to 1932 when they suddenly discovered it, "they just left Russia out." But the enthusiastic British pro-Russian can do with nothing less than a wholehearted and uncritical absorption such as he could not get from them on this, or indeed, on any subject. As a matter of fact, they were deeply interested, if also highly critical, during the nine years from 1922-31 in which his immersion in active politics made it impossible for them to give it more than an attention that, while always alert, was naturally governed to a large extent by the reaction of Russian events on those in Great Britain.

Then, in 1931, came the smash, and also the release. The release set them free for work, the smash compelled their minds to face the revealed weaknesses of the British form of representative democracy, and stimulated them to interrogate its alternative. They determined to go and look at Russia. Whether or no he agreed with the grand gesture with which she threw Gradualism over board at a Fabian gathering in the early spring of 1932, one may not know, with her, too, the action was probably mainly expressive of bitter disappointment and temporary

exasperation. Some
disillusionment, however candidly faced and
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